

**Statement by
U.S. Representative Edward J. Markey (D-MA)
Bipartisan Congressional Task Force on Alzheimer's Disease
June 8, 1999**

Good morning, I am pleased to be joined by my colleague Rep. Christopher Smith (R-NY) and David Hyde Pierce the co-star of the hit T.V. show *Frasier*, in announcing the kick-off of the first Bipartisan Congressional Task Force on Alzheimer's Disease.

Today, 4 million Americans are affected by Alzheimer's Disease. Through the Task Force we hope to focus the attention of Congress on who these people are, how they suffer and how we can make a difference in their lives and the lives of their family members. To date we have 22 Task Force members -- and that's a good start --- but our goal is to increase this membership to 100. By the end of this year I hope to see 100 Congressional Task Force members united in the task of bringing relief to at home care givers of Alzheimer's Disease, united in the task of alleviating the suffering of those victimized by the ravages of Alzheimer's Disease and united in the task of forcing this disease to its knees.

Alzheimer's Disease is indiscriminate and cruel. It creeps into the brain, captures the mind and irrevocably alters the personality of its victims. It tests the strength and endurance of the family members who live with, and often become the primary caregivers to the Alzheimer's patient. I know, because my mother suffered with Alzheimer's Disease for over ten years and my father cared for her day in and day out for that entire time.

Our family's story is not uncommon, however. The vast majority of people with Alzheimer's live at home and are cared for by families and friends at an average out-of-pocket cost of \$12,500 per year. The total national cost of Alzheimer care today is \$100 billion and families pay most of that cost themselves.

As I mentioned 4 million are currently affected by Alzheimer's Disease. However, as the baby boomers reach the age of greatest risk, this disease is expected to affect 14 million. Like a health care hurricane on the horizon, Alzheimer's is on track to tip over our nation's health care system, and in its wake millions of American families will be left in emotional and financial ruin.

To confront this crisis, it's time for Congress to become more involved. The Task Force will sponsor briefings to broaden Member's understanding of Alzheimer's Disease and all of its implications, to spur open bipartisan discussion on how to meet the long-term care needs of those afflicted and to encourage increased research funding for the discovery of treatments and possibly a cure.

Last month I had the pleasure and the honor of meeting with Dr. Richard Hodes, Director of the National Institute on Aging. We discussed on the latest scientific advancements surrounding Alzheimer's Disease. Scientists have identified four genes that are associated with Alzheimer's and preliminary studies indicate that anti-inflammatories, such as ibuprofen, and antioxidants such as vitamin E, may slow the progression of the disease.

In the last two years I have led efforts in the House to increase research funding for Alzheimer's Disease and last year Congress appropriated a \$50 million increase. This increase along with the research advances made over the past decade have raised the scientific community's expectations of success and lifted the hopes of the 19 million American family members who have a loved one with Alzheimer's. There is real hope in research which is why we have to continue to fight to increase research dollars.

We need to wage a war against Alzheimer's Disease on all fronts. We need to help and give hope to the

victims who are fighting through each day, shouldering enormous physical, mental and behavioral burdens. We need to help and give hope to the behind-the-scenes heroes – like my father – the family care-givers who selflessly offer their care. And we need to help the researchers working hard to find a cure. Without taking this action we fail to address the epidemic that Alzheimer's Disease threatens to create in the new millennium.

Now is the time to head off the health care hurricane on the horizon. Today as we launch the Bipartisan Congressional Task Force on Alzheimer's Disease I challenge to get involved, to join this fight and to lend their support in tackling Alzheimer's Disease on all fronts.

Thank you.